

## THE FOOLISHNESS OF 'FRISCO

By MAITLAND LEROY OSBORNE.

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"I was sure loosed once," said 'Frisco, poking a reflective forefinger into the bowl of his briarwood pipe. "All along of it being spring and me as frisky and foolish as a two-year-old."

"It wasn't just because the girl was pretty—I've met up with a plenty better looking ones before and since—but there was something in her eyes that made my heart wobble round a whole lot when she looked at me. Blue they were, like that patch of clear sky over the trees yonder, and big and innocent. I used to dream about them nights while I was riding herd with ten thousand long-horned and my own thoughts for company, and when a fellow gets to where thinking of the color of a girl's eyes keeps him from being lonesome he's pretty far along toward being in love with her."

"Did you, Taylor, who owned the Bar-O ranch in the Sweetwater valley, was her uncle, and the doctors had sent her out from somewhere back east to live outdoors for a few months. The day after the old man brings her out from town with the buckboard he calls me up to the ranch house and tells me he wants me to see that she has a good time and don't get lost."

"You see, the old man had known me quite a while and hadn't ever heard of my trying to steal anybody's durn. Well, I stuck up my chest and turned nursemaid real cheerful and contented, and for four long months there's hardly an hour of the day that I'm not round somewhere handy in case that girl wants me to play with."

"I picked out the most sober-minded cow pony on the ranch and broke him till a baby could have led him round with a string, and then I learned to ride, and after that we was gambling over the landscape pretty much all the time."

"First off, being new to the game, I was a little shy on language, but she was so interested in me bringing that I got to be real eloquent in a time. It was all new to her, you see, and different from anything she'd ever seen or heard of or dreamed about, and she just soaked up new experiences like a sponge soaked up water. Even the boys were different from what she'd been used to back east, and every time I found a new one to show her I felt like I'd struck a streak of pay dirt."

"Every day she was growing prettier, her hands were getting bigger, the sun and the color coming into her cheeks and her eyes growing brighter—and every day I was getting more in love with her and more afraid she'd find it out."

"It's curious how being in love affects some people. I believe I'd have stopped smoking if that girl had asked me—which she didn't. She had me halter-broke in about a week, so I'd stand all day without being hitched, and when she'd smile at me for a millionth part of a second I'd feel as tickled as a yellow pup when somebody tosses him a bone. I was sure foolish over her and glad of it."

"But trouble was coming my way—fast, and one day along in August, when she'd been with me for a month, we've got to have some supplies, so I hitch a couple of cayuses to the buckboard and starts for town at sun-up. It's an all-day drive, and after I puts up the ponies and has my supper and order the store truck I goes out to mingle in the festivities. Naturally I'm a whole lot thirstier after riding all day in the sun, so I let the Palace saloon absorb me and drifts up to the bar, wondering whether I'll be straight or not. A couple of the new kind of fancy striped drinks, but just as the barkeep pushes me a bottle of red-eye my way I catches a glimpse of a little blue-eyed girl on a spotted pony riding along the trail to meet me, and I sticks out my chest and says, careless like, 'Gimme a lemonade—with plenty of ice!'"

"The barkeep looks at me sort of surprised, but he deals the hand I've called for and I stands up there in a row all by myself and drinks my lemonade. Somehow the place seems sort of quiet and lonesome, though there's a piano banging away in one corner and about a hundred cow-punchers calling for drinks in seven languages, so I drifts out into the street and again stands on the corner and gazes at the festive throng wondering if I'm sick. I've got money in my pocket—it's the first time I've heard chips rattling for three months, and I find out all of a sudden I'm not amused a little bit. 'Frisco,' I say to myself, 'you're too good for this world, you'd better go to bed,' which I does, after smoking two bits' worth of three-for-a-quarter cigars."

"In the morning I turns out good and early, loads up the buckboard with canned goods and groceries and lopes over to the postoffice for the mail. The postmaster hails me when I sticks my head in the door and asks if I want company. Says there's a tenderfoot come in on the stage the day before who's looking for Taylor's ranch, and course, I says yes, and pretty soon they rounds him up and shows him to me. He's hardly more than a boy, and he has on more good clothes than I've ever seen before all at one time. He looks like he's a mighty long ways from home, and the minute I set eyes on him

I know what he's there for as well as though I'd been told."

"I reckon maybe I didn't look real joyful to see him, but he's so anxious to get started that he don't notice, and pretty soon we pulls out for the Bar-O. For the first hour or two I watches the road pretty close and don't say much, sizing up my passenger out of the corner of my eye when he ain't noticing. Except for his good clothes he ain't a bad looking boy, and I know he holds all the cards and will win in a show-down. When I think of how glad the girl is going to be when she sees him I feel a whole lot like dropping him in the sage brush and letting him get lost."

"Along toward noon we're riding round a sand hill when the ponies stick up their ears in a way that means one of two things—bear or Indian, and it ain't more than a minute before I see 'em Indians. There's quite a bunch of them, maybe twenty or thirty, spread out so we can't get by and waiting real

patient for us to drive up and say howdy."

"They're all young braves, in paint and feathers, and I know what their game is the minute I set eyes on them. They has a playful habit those days of breaking out of the reservation occasionally and burning a few ranch houses and scalping a few women and children, and then sneaking back to their teepees after dark and laughing at the soldiers who come up on the run usually about the time the fires stop smoking."

"I heads the ponies round so sudden that the buckboard makes a circle on one wheel, and starts back for town like I'd forgotten a mighty important errand. 'What's up?' the boy asks, holding onto the seat with his hands. 'The noble red man's up,' I says, dodging a bullet that sings by my ear like a mosquito. 'He's seeing red and thirsty for gore,' I says, and if you want to keep on wearing your own hair you'd better hold on tight."



"By jove," the boy pipes up, real excited and pleased, "I really believe I hit the beggar."

"There's a big, shelving rock about a mile back, not far from the trail, and I know if we can reach that I can hold them off for quite a spell, so I slaps the reins on the ponies' backs and yells a few times, and we drifts over the landscape like a yellow dog with a can tied to his tail, shedding store truck something sinful. Every time we hit a rock we jolt off a can of tomatoes or a bag of flour, till it looks like a cyclone has scattered a general store all along the trail. And all the time them blamed Indians are crawling up on us, hanging over their ponies' necks and yelling like hell let loose."

"When the rock's about five hundred yards ahead and the nearest Indian about as far behind, one of the ponies steps in a prairie dog's hole and goes down with a broken leg, and before I have time to swear we're piled up in a heap so promiscuous that I don't know for a second or two which is me and which is the buckboard. But I crawl out of the wreck mighty spry and looks

round for the boy. He's setting in a puddle of molasses and flour and broken eggs, hugging a ham under one arm and looking mighty surprised, but not hurt a bit."

"It ain't any time to stop and talk, so I cuts the other cayuse loose from what's left of the buckboard, and picks up the boy and chucks him onto his back. 'Now ride, you little cuss,' I says, grabbing the pony's tail and prodding him in the rump with the point of my knife, and we heads for the rock, hitting only the high places, with the pony towing me and the nearest Indian reaching for my back hair. I never has much on traveling foot, but I reckon I must have broke all the running records for a 500-yard dash right then and there, and we made the rock just ahead of our red brothers. I knows then we're all right for a while, for they can only get at us by riding straight up, which ain't an Indian's idea of fighting at all."

"We cuddles down in a little hollow, and the Indians ride back and begin to paw-waw. 'Then a few of them split off and take a circle around to see if they can get at us from the rear, but I don't worry none, knowing they can't get us. Pretty soon they ride back, and after a lot more talking I see they're going to try to rush us. 'Can you shoot?' I asks the boy. 'Don't know,' he says, 'never tried to.' 'Well,' I says, handing him one of my forty-fours, 'you've got to learn how right now. Keep your eye on that big buck on the spotted pony and when he gets this side of that bunch sage brush open up on him. Shoot low and keep on shooting till you hit something.' The boy takes the gun, looks at it like a speckled rooster admiring a new sort of worm, and pokes it out over a stone real business-like."

"Then the crowd breaks loose and comes up with rush, shooting and yelling like mad. I've just made a good Indian out of a cross-eyed brave with a yellow feather headpiece when I hear a shot behind me and the big buck that I pointed out to the boy doubles up and slides off his pony like a bag of sand. 'By Jove!' the boy pipes up, real excited and pleased, 'I really believe I hit the beggar.' I really believe you did, sonny," I says, patting him on the back. 'The Indians split up in two bunches and go by on the run out of range."

"When they come back, the boy getting excited, forgets to hug the ground close enough, and a bullet kicks up the dust in front of him, knocks off his hat, and flattens against the rock behind me, and he tumbles back across my legs. I thinks they've got him then, sure, but it's only a glancing cut on the side of his head that stuns him."

"I'd tumbled another Indian off his pony as they went back, which made three out of the game altogether, but I see they're going to try it again, so I pushes the boy down behind me and loads both guns with a hurry. When I see him laying there, looking as innocent as a baby, with his white face and a smile on his lips and the blood trickling down one cheek, I think of the little girl back there on the ranch and the look that'll be in her eyes if I go back and tell her that he's dead, and I gets mighty hot and uncomfortable. 'They may get his hair yet,' I says to myself, 'but they've got to get mine first.' Then the boys begin again the bullets buzz around my ears like a lot of bees."

"Four times those infernal redskins circled the rock, and six of their ponies had lost their riders, but I was getting 'hot up' quite a lot, having to expose myself some to keep the boy covered. When all of a sudden I hears a strain of the sweetest music I ever listened to, a bugle sounding the charge and a company of troopers heading her from behind a sand hill. When they come in sight the Indians just naturally tumble all over themselves, trying to get away, and the whole outfit goes by in a cloud of dust, leaving me to get 'hot up' quite a lot, having to expose myself some to keep the boy covered. When all of a sudden I hears a strain of the sweetest music I ever listened to, a bugle sounding the charge and a company of troopers heading her from behind a sand hill. 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